

RULE ONE: S.E.P. (Somebody Else's Problem) Luke 10:1-11
First in Four Week Series: Jesus Help Desk

Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV
7th Sunday after Pentecost (July 3) 2016

^{10:1} After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go.² And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."³ Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.⁴ Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road.⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' ⁶ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you.⁷ And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house.⁸ Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you.⁹ Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say,¹¹ 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.'

I am grateful for the telephone call I received from Jimmy Barker a couple of weeks ago, which brought my attention to some of the material contained in the bulletin tear off sheet. I call your attention to it now, and ask that you go ahead and fill it out. Just off the top of your head, without looking into your Bibles, please.

1. Which of the following expressions IS actually found in the Bible? (You may mark one or more)
 - a. ___ All things will pass; this, too, will pass.
 - b. ___ God never gives you more than you can handle.
 - c. ___ The one who is not against you is for you.
 - d. ___ The lion shall lay down with the lamb.
 - e. ___ God takes care of those who take care of themselves.
 - f. ___ Cleanliness is next to godliness
 - g. ___ Spare the rod; spoil the child

Please mark an X beside every one of the sayings that is found in the Bible. You may pick more than one. *[Pause to give time for folks to fill out the survey]*

Review the correct answer. Only one: C. That is found just a few verses before today's Gospel lesson, in Luke 9:50.

None of the others are found in the Bible. Some of those may surprise you. I am sure that most folks thought (d) "The lion shall lay down with the lamb" is in there. After all, we have that beautiful wall mural of the lion and the lamb lying beside one another, down in the dining room – painted by the Rev'd's Frank L. Shaffer, Jr. and Richard Work.

But nope – it's not. I will gladly receive any contradictory answers you research comes up with this coming week.

Today begins a sermon series on how Jesus deploys His disciples to go out and do work. ***Christianity for Jesus is not a spectator sport.*** But He does not send them, then, nor us, today, out without direction and protection. This four week sermon series will be help for the mission from **THE JESUS HELP DESK**.

It might be helpful for disciples to have some good working knowledge of the Holy Bible. It helps prevent us from being duped. It also provides us with strength.

If you marked an X beside (d) in the exercise, you would probably thinking about Isaiah chapter 11:1-2, 6-7

**¹ There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.**

**² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.**

**⁶ The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.**

**⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.**

Ah – the wolf shall lay down with the lamb.

Why do we always say it is the lion? I have no idea. It certainly is a prevalent mis-quotation of the prophecy of Isaiah – of how it will be in the Day of the Lord.

But **Jesus did not get it wrong**. In today's Gospel, verse 3, He says:

behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves

The point that I am trying to make here is that Jesus sends us out, with direction and protection **when we accept the reality of what is going on** ... when we realize **that we are being called to be agents, ambassadors of the Kingdom of Heaven**.

- That Kingdom of Heaven – ON EARTH – is what Isaiah was prophesying.
- That Kingdom of Heaven – ON EARTH, IN THE PRESENT TENSE – is what Jesus is talking about being present now, in verse 11 of today's Gospel lesson.
- That Kingdom of Heaven – ON EARTH, IN THE PRESENT TENSE – is what Jesus came to proclaim as His central message – through work and deed: **THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND**.

When we take up the gauntlet, as lambs in the midst of wolves, we are submitting to the direction and protection of that Kingdom on earth in the present tense.

It means – that in order to go out and do the mission to which we are called, and which is our purpose, we must -- **AND GET THIS PLEASE; THIS IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT** -- **IN ORDER TO GO OUT AND DO THE MISSION TO WHICH WE ARE CALLED, AND WHICH IS OUR PURPOSE, WE DO NOT AND CANNOT OPERATE OUT OF A CONDITION OF FEAR**. (1 John 4:18)

IN ORDER TO GO OUT AND DO THE MISSION TO WHICH WE ARE CALLED, AND WHICH IS OUR PURPOSE, WE DO NOT AND CANNOT BE DEPENDENT UPON THE FORCES OF THE WORLDLY POWER.

THAT is a radical message.

THAT is the Gospel.

THAT is so hard for so many to accept. Especially those who are deep into fear and deep into the protection supposedly offered by worldly power.

And many will reject both that Kingdom message as well as the messenger.

And that is where the sermon title comes from. And that is what Jesus was talking about in verses 10 & 11, of today's Gospel.

The Sermon title (S.E.P. – Somebody Else's Problem) I first encountered in the writing of *Douglas Adams*, in **LIFE, THE UNIVERSE, AND EVERYTHING**:

“The Somebody Else's Problem [force] field is much simpler and more effective, and what's more can be run for over a hundred years on a single [flashlight] battery. This is because it relies on people's natural disposition not to see anything they don't want to, weren't expecting, or can't explain.”

Certainly there is danger in the concept, when using the definition that Adams gives. By this definition, the inference is clear: we don't care about what happened in Clendenin, Elkview, Greenbrier County, and elsewhere, because it's not our problem. Adam's S.E.P. is completely narcissistic and completely NOT the Gospel.

And today's Sunday School class dealt with that.

It is certainly NOT the message of Jesus.

But S.E.P. **IS** the message of verses 10 and 11 of today's Gospel.

When the message is proclaimed by disciples of Jesus and ambassadors of the Kingdom of Heaven that **WE DO NOT AND CANNOT OPERATE OUT OF A CONDITION OF FEAR**, and that **WE DO NOT AND CANNOT BE DEPENDENT UPON THE FORCES OF THE**

WORLDLY POWER, and people reject that message, we need to understand that their rejection is THEIR PROBLEM.

Our worth – yours and mine – is NOT DETERMINED by the opinions of others. We shake the dust of their rejection off the soles of our shoes and move on. Perhaps in another day, they will be in the right frame of mind when they hear the message again. But we cannot allow their rejection of the message of Jesus to mean that WE ARE NOT VALUABLE. We move on and plant the seed elsewhere, in other fertile soil.

We don't condemn them, as some people interpret these verses 10 & 11. We simply do not allow them to bring us down.

Our success is not the test of our worth. Our faithfulness is.

And to be faithful, we need to remember that **WE DO NOT AND CANNOT OPERATE OUT OF A CONDITION OF FEAR**, and that **WE DO NOT AND CANNOT BE DEPENDENT UPON THE FORCES OF THE WORLDLY POWER**, and that when people reject this message, we need to understand that their rejection is THEIR PROBLEM.

We are living in a very strange time right now in the course of human history, my sisters and brothers. I can't explain it. I am trying to observe it as best as I can, in hopes of gaining understanding.

But, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, I cannot allow the current apparently chaotic times to cause me to **OPERATE OUT OF A CONDITION OF FEAR**, nor to **BE DEPENDENT UPON THE FORCES OF WORLDLY POWER**. And when people reject that message, I must remember that their rejection is THEIR PROBLEM.

So may it be. So may it be.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.